796 778 In the village of Kangaba a sanctuary, called mande blo "vestibule of Mande," or kaba blo "vestibule of astonishment," is the object of a septennial ritual attended by representatives of all the races /who are/ said to be of the same origin. There ceremony consists in rebuilding the roof of the sanctuary which shelters an object dolin, but only those persons of pure race belonging to the Kéita family (1) and the

551 1. The name of Kéita, for which various etymologies have been found, is that of the founders of the Mandingo empire. Cf. C. Monteil, Les Empires du Mali, p. 31, and L. Tauxier, Histoire des Bambara /Bambara History/, p. 40: "The first kings of Mali lived at Kangaba and were in fact Kéita."

By extension the name of Kéita may be adopted by individuals belonging to one of the tribes originating in Mandé. Thus a Dogon will take on as dyamu Kéita if he comes to live in Mandé. On the other hand, the heraldic device of the Kéita, which relates the high deeds of the Mandingo princes, includes the devices of almost all the tribes said to be of the same origin. This common origin may perhaps throw some light on the institution of regularized name changes observed in Black Africa, a problem which has claimed the attention of some authors; see in particular P. Humblot, Du nom et des appellations chez les Malinke /Names and nomenclature among the Maunke/.

traditional griot of the chiefs of Mandé, the Dyabaté, are authorized to perform the ritual. Only they may penetrate the sanctuary and tread on its soil, which is said to be "heavier and more powerful than all things." (2)

778 346 2. Kangaba dugukolo ka gri fɛ̃w be. The sanctuary is a round hut provided with two doors, one oriented to the east and the

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other to the west, and covered with a thatched roof in which is hidden an object called dolin. The village is surrounded by several sacred places: a sunzun tree to the north; a well to the west; two stones, one (fara fi) situated near the village and the other (fara gwe) on the river's edge.

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The septennial ceremony is performed at night. Toward evening, the eldest of the Kéita goes secretly to remove the object dolin from the old thatch and hides it. The new roof is made with materials gathered by the descendants of Farako Makan Kegni (straw, bamboo, and fibers) while the women of the same relationship plaster the walls. The Dyabaté griot who will officiate provide themselves with a little stick of sunzun wood about the length of the ring finger with which they will rub their teeth; the twigs must be cut by the elder sister of the chief of the griot who gives her in exchange /xv/ a loin-cloth of eight bands of white cotton and a number of cowries in multiples of 8 such as 8, 480.

[801]

The orators who will officiate during the night wear a white cap topped by a band of cotton of the same color and a yellow tunic (wolo) (see p. 20). Sitting inside the hut from which the old roof has been removed, facing east, they spit into a receptacle in order not to soil the ground. The Kéita remain outside the hut on a site marked by stones and covered with gravel collected in the river bed by young men. During the entire night, the griot, each in turn and encouraged by a relative, recite from the devices of all the tribes issued from Mandé. At dawn, they sing as they circle the construction; then the Kéita hoist up the new roof. Next, the elder

794 778 B. Altars of the Komo

The boli altars occupy a distinguished place in the religious and mythological representations of the society organized around them. On the one hand they are a capsule of the universe because of their composition; on the other they are a capsule of the society as all its members are present in them. In fact, each member has provided a part of the composing elements after having impregnated them with his person by salivating over them while pronouncing his name.

794 778 346 The altars of the Komo are kept in a sanctuary, the komo so (literally, house of the Komo), a medium sized hut built either in the chief's dwelling place, or in the bush at some distance from the village. The approach to this structure which is under Faro's protection is forbidden to the ordinary person. The chief himself never enters alone. It is said that a snake, the soul and guardian of the sanctuary, is born and lives at the top of the hut in the branches which form the roof (Pl. VI, a).

The hut is divided into a number of floors on each of which is placed /146/ an altar. The highest one contains at its center the nimara boli (literally, altar of the souls) which, as its name indicates, is the container of the souls belonging to deceased members of the society and to sacrificed animals (1). It contains, from top to bottom,

[774 782] 1. There is constant preoccupation with preserving all vital elements. The souls of sacrificed animals are the object of the same care as those of humans. Like them, they participate in the resurrection promised to everything which has lived.

hair of the dead, copper for the souls of animals, gold for those of men. These various ingredients, placed in a double sac, receive the sacrificial blood which runs between the two layers and soaks them.

794 778 The nimara boli is surrounded by small individual altars which have served to channel the souls of the dying and lead them to the common receptacle (2). These small boli remain in the hut only

2. See p. 175.

1: Dieterlen--210b E-5 (1946-1949) 1951 FA8 Bambara FA8

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a) Hut of the Komo (Konodimini).

Plate VI

b) Holes for refuse (Banankoroni).

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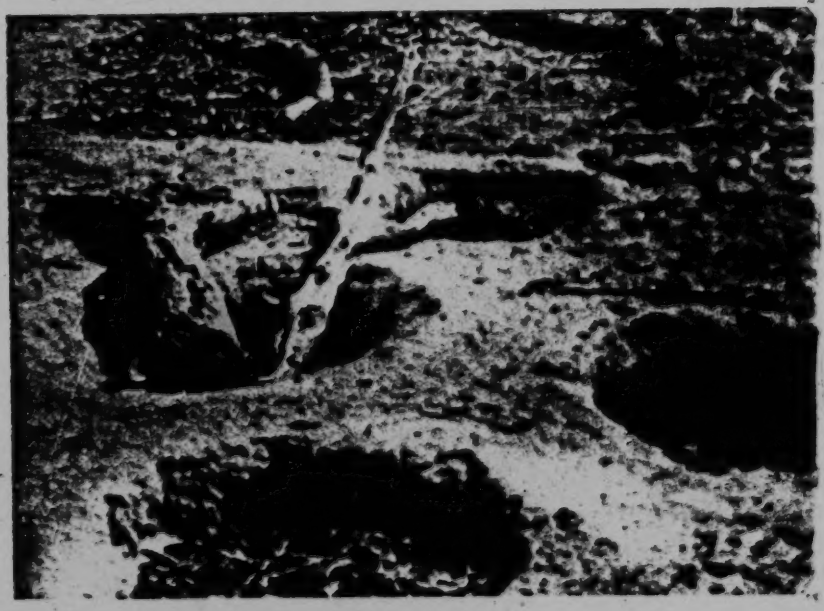

794 778 "After the creation came the consecration. The Kouroubari and the leaders of the people witnessed it. A white ox, a red ox, and a red rooster were sacrificed for the occasion (2)."

2. Raffenel, Nouveau voyage au Pays des Nègres [New Journey to the Country of the Negroes], Vol. 1, p. 237.

The boli is usually hidden from the uninitiated; it is put in a sack or other receptacle, and except during ceremonies it [846] is stored with other cult objects in a kind of temple often resembling a miniature native hut and called nyana-bon', "hut of the nyana."

[776] Obviously there are differences between the various nyana, because peculiar practices call up unlike spirits. In any event, however, the captive spirit is, as it were, a slave of the magician, who treats it as such and even sells it, along with instructions for its use. There are magicians who go from place to place, making and selling nyana and other magic weapons, and [443] there are recognized markets where one can always [256] obtain the boli of the most popular nyana. The markets at Bélédougou, Bendougou, and Follona are especially well known.

Trade in Boli

794 778 438 The chronicle of Ségou tells that Biton, the founder of the empire, acquired his principal idols in the Bendougou region where the popular markets of Moribala, Kourbadougou, and Diali are located.

Itinerant merchants deal in all sorts of cult objects, and there are settled traders who are sometimes very well known, like a certain Minkoli who made boli and was so famous that his village is named after him: Minkoli ka dugu (village of Minkoli). I have never been able to find out, however, which village in the Bendougou area was the home of the famous Minkoli.

By such means the cult of a given nyana, once it has been created, spreads to some extent, depending on the degree

794 This boli-den'-fa is provided with the usual boli-de:
[778] kana, korti, siri-kun', etc. [284]
[346] A hut with a conical roof serves as temple (Nya-bon').
An orchestra accompanies the ceremonies; it includes
[534] a kind of harp, made by the natives and peculiar to the Nya, plus large numbers of the usual drums, bells, and trumpets.

Since the Nya is acquired by purchase, the high priest (Nya-tigi) is theoretically the person who contributed most generously to this purchase. The office may also be attained by inheritance or by election. The truly religious role, however, is that of the wara-mina-den', the medium through which the god reveals his will or his desires and who is, therefore, the oracle (wara-da) of the Nya. A certain amount of training by appropriate methods is necessary to acquire the degree of extra-lucidity claimed by the wara-mina-den', and that is why they are recruited by co-optation.

794 Under the influence of the Nya, the wara-mina-den' falls
787 into a trance. His speech, hesitant and strange, is incomprehensible to the common people. The Nya-tigi then approaches to receive and to interpret the oracle. The inspiration of the wara-mina-den' may be spontaneous or it may be provoked and deliberately sought by him. For example, when a person dies, the wara-mina-den' questions the Nya, either at the request of the interested parties or of his own volition. For this purpose, he retires to the temple (Nya-bon'), concentrates on the point to be clarified, and after meditating, withdraws (1). He then sometimes

1. These details were given to me by a wara-mina-den' of Soun-Bambara.

falls asleep, and while he sleeps, the Nya reveals the truth to him in a dream. On other occasions the wara-mina-den' falls into a trance, and the spirit speaks through his mouth. One way or another, it is learned whether the death is to be attributed to the Nya and, if so, why. Or it is made plain that it is the work of the suba and under what form, human or otherwise, they are hiding. Or, finally, it is learned whether some other nyana struck down the deceased.

764 left of each chamber's entrance and was left to go out by itself. The body was placed in the middle of the chamber, the feet to the north and the head to the south. At the time of a new burial, all the long bones were gathered in one corner of the chamber and all the skulls in another, for the number of deceased was verified by these. Finally in the Kokum region hundreds of tumuli cover vaults consisting of a [346] heart-shaped chamber cut in the laterite and preceded by a vestibule to the west and by steps cut into the rock which lead to the open air. The outside and inside doors are closed by a slab of laterite. The outside door is hidden under the tumulus, with three equally-spaced stones marking the location. The skulls are arranged in a dome and separated from the long bones. Lastly, the tomb of the village's founding ancestor is found in the center of the village, to the north of the old fortified court of the chiefs' house.

III. Art

517 The Bambara conception of art is very different from the occidental idea of art for art's sake. Every object that we find beautiful has a precise social, religious, or technical significance for the Bambara: "The art of the Blacks is purposeful ... it is gratuitous projection in a material of ideas and knowledge which bring the user or spectator nothing other than themselves. Doubtless crude in the first stages, often the product of superficial knowledge or even of calculated errors, the esthetic sense of the Blacks is clarified and affirmed as they learn and as they pass from a 'light knowledge' to a knowledge of the great secrets. It seems impossible to an educated man that he could make an abstraction of his knowledge to judge a dance or to become enthusiastic over the playing of a clever harpist. What we call beauty is for the Black the adequacy of the object to represent that for which it is created." (1)

1. M. Griaule, "L'art nègre" [Negro Art], Présence africaine.

532 The masks conceal the person and transform the human being into a supernatural being. They are the privileged instrument of the [749] nyama, the first [104] model having been carved to fix the vital force of the first dead ancestor in a wooden figure. "The society of

852 tear, a complaint, or a cry of pain, and they are so imperious that
796 one might think they were of bronze.
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The N'golo, the Special Fetish of the Circumcised

852 The children of this fetish, whose function I explained in the
794 preceding chapter, grant themselves many days of celebration in its honor in the course of the year. The main festival, however, is annual and in addition to the dégé, a hen, and two kola nuts offered by each initiate, a goat is sacrificed on behalf of all.

Since it is from this fetish that the fla-n-to organization derives its existence, its members, the to-n-déou, offer drink and food to the whole village for two or three days. The women, too, contribute their share to this horrible drinking bout, and their queen (fama, massa) -- humbling herself before the to-n-tigi, head of the fla-n-to and priest of the n'golo, who thoughtlessly wastes the produce of the field worked by his subjects in the winter -- distributes many kola nuts and adds still more to the d'lo, which already flows in streams.

The beer is drunk out of doors on the public square, and everyone -- men, women, and children -- is there, shouting, dancing, and getting drunk. Seated under a goua, a shed covered with coarse [346] mats, /113/ and surrounded by his acolytes (the siéré, the djéli, and the djalatiké), the to-n-tigi sits in the place of honor, and it is he who directs the drinking and the dances. He is really king on these days, and all obey him at the slightest sign, gesture, or word. When he gets up to romp or take a turn before the drums, he is honored; all the initiates call "you you," shake their caps (ban fla), and compete as to who will take his gun, spear, stick, or ax and beat the time for the dance. But he wants to speak; he must speak; he feels the need to issue an order, to give thanks, or to impose a light fine on his band; and his spokesman runs to his side. He repeats the speech of his chief word for word and sentence by sentence, and sometimes even adds a comment of his own, for some Bambara have a sharp wit and very easily find a saying to bring a laugh.

778 kola nuts required in every sacrifice. All the people of the village
782 rejoice at the annual sacrifice. From the goat hut, where hangs the goatskin that serves as its tabernacle (1), the fetish is carried in pro-

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1. The Bambara, whose huts are usually very clean, put their gods away in dark, filthy corners. The temples are small and have such low doors that it is often necessary to lie prone in order to enter.

cession to the place of sacrifice, a large tree that casts a little shade inside the village. During the procession the initiates shout sacred hymns at the tops of their voices, drums and xylophones beat and rumble, and all the circumcised stop when it passes /144/ and reverently bare their heads. The women and the uncircumcised kneel and bow their heads respectfully at the passing of the idol, which is hidden from profane view by a dirty cloth covering.

778 The boli of the second group are legion, and it is very difficult to know all of them. The main two are the Tji wara and the Douga.

A Tji wara seldom gives evidence of its power. Although it may kill its owner or anyone who happens to separate the male from the female in the course of the sacred dance, a Negro is seldom heard to blame it for the death of one of his family. This fetish is made of two forked sticks, one male and the other female, on which sacrifices are made. It may be seen hanging in the entry hut of its master, along with its cloak of false-cedar bark and its mask which are used in the sacred dance.

778 The mask of the Tji wara is tastefully made; in fact, it is the
532 best Bambara sculpture I have seen. It is carved of the wood of the dondol (Bombax cornui) and seems intended to represent a goat or a deer. The male often has curved horns and sometimes measures almost a meter in height. The female is smaller, its horns are straight, rings hang from its nose and ears and, no doubt because a goddess could not be sterile, it carries its child on its back. (1) During the

178 534 the Nama are made of bamboo and smaller than those of the Komo. The big instrument here is the drum which is beaten with a bent iron rod. The syncopation is given on the bass drum which is wooden; the vibrations of the skins stop, and one would say that the sound is the knock of a bone that is broken clean; it gives one the shivers.

178 The Komo is always most carefully hidden, and one has to belong to the village to know in which hut it dwells. The main parts of the fetish are enclosed in baskets just like those used for transporting cotton, but three iron rods (3) on which /148/ sacrifices are made

> 3. In the presence of the uninitiated these sticks are called Komo djoloko, and (again so that none of the mysteries will be revealed) the warada, those who speak in the name of the idol, are called djoloko samana, "those who carry the chains of Komo."

are usually kept in the skin of a striped cat. The Nama lives under a tamarind tree outside the village and has a beehive for a tabernacle. [417] The whole thing is surrounded by a djasé, a kind of palisade made of coarse mats which hides from the uninitiated both the hive and the receptacle into which the remainder of the victims' blood is poured.

178 ●346 The Nia and the Wara, or Djara, have round huts surmounted by conical thatch roofs. While the first is inside the village, the second is always outside at one of the entrances. The Kono has a square house with a flat terrace roof. It is always decorated with small bells fastened by lines on which are hung skulls of dogs and goats that have been sacrificed. Usually, if not always, it faces the inside of the village. The Magna does not have a temple strictly speaking, but it has its altar, a round turret surmounted by a receptacle [824] to receive the blood of victims. It is outside the village and always under a silk-cotton tree (Eriodendron anfractuosum -- kapok tree).

178 The Komo is equipped with a jointed mask and a cloak made of feathers of guinea fowl, hens, etc., which are used for the sacred dance. By means of a stick which the feather cloak hides from sight,

881 until they are completely healed; for it is not until evening, when the setting sun reddens the horizon and takes on its bloody hue that [292] they re-enter the village. From this day on they wear a costume (all yellow if they are Bambara) of trousers, a blouse, and on their heads a kind of handkerchief tied under the chin (4). They pass the time in

4. In some villages, instead of the yellow handkerchief the circumcised have a cap with two points. In Bani country the circumcised wear the blouse and handkerchief, or cap, and nothing more.

making mats, singing, striking together gourd disks strung on a stick, and especially in eating, "for they are being stuffed," and in sleeping. /181/

881 But in speaking of the boys, I forgot the little girls! They undress under the tree nearest to the sacred karite. Naked as a worm, 304 each one when her turn comes runs at top speed with her abdomen to the ground and throws herself into the arms of a woman, also of the blacksmith caste, who immediately cuts her. On a braided platter, [285 made of fine, pliable grass, the mother or her substitute receives the 415 bloody fragment which will be a grigri, a talisman or good-luck 789] charm for the house, and while the gunpowder speaks, the disabled girl, pretending not to be suffering at all from the loss of her clitoris, goes back to her place, and another replaces her.

881 The session ends with the last girl, and the crowd breaks out in a song of joy and triumph. The mother, the eldest sister, or a [482 serving woman wraps the excised girl in a big white cloth and carries her astride her back to the village to the hut which has been prepared for her (1). This carrying, so laughable in itself (they can walk, even

[621 346]

1. Each village is divided into quarters. The excised girls of each quarter have their hut in that quarter.

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Sacred dance in honor of the N'tomo, the children's fetish.
/sub-caption: The hut with a conical roof, on the right, is the temple of the boli fetish Nia./

4: Henry--268 M-5 (ca. 1900) 1910 FA8 Bambara FA8

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4: Henry-275 M-5 (ca. 1900) 1910 FA8 Bambara FA8

Sacred dance of the mourou kalatigi (sacrificer) after a sacrifice accepted by the boli M'bie Djougou at Talakala.

Mask of the boli fetish Komo.

Temple of Nia, a powerful boli.

Above: Pillar of the Magnan, a powerful boli fetish.

4: Henry--276 M-5 (ca. 1900) 1910 FA8 Bambara FA8

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Zanké and the boli fetish, Kono.

Temple of the Kono fetish.